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ABSTRACT

Three brochures for parents are presented. The first lists potential playground hazards and suggestions for improving playgrounds. The second describes benefits of the multiage classroom, comparing such a classroom with a traditional, single-grade class. The third brochure describes verbal, logical, visual, musical, and physical learning styles and provides tips on working with children to maximize these ways of learning. (LSH)

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ACEI SPEAKS

A Parent's Guide to Playground Safety

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Sponsored by the Delaware ACEI

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Getting hurt is not just a normal consequence of growing up. When kids are seriously injured on a playground, someone failed to do his job.

Over 200,000 children suffer injuries each year that require emergency room treatment. Many of these injuries occur at public park, public school, preschool and fast food restaurant playgrounds that are in a state of disrepair. Outmoded, poorly designed equipment and improperly installed and maintained equipment present physical hazards to children. Other factors that contribute to playground injuries and fatalities include lack of education on playground safety for parents, caregivers and teachers that results in poor supervision of children at play; and children's declining levels of motor skill and general fitness due to conflicting activities such as television, video games and fear that community play areas may be dangerous.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC) *Handbook for Public Playground Safety* (1991) is the most widely accepted set of safety guidelines and should be considered the minimum level for playground safety. Review these guidelines and evaluate the playgrounds where your child plays. The CPSC maintains a hotline (800-638-2772) for reporting dangerous products, product related injuries and for consumer information.

What are common safety hazards on playgrounds?

- Hard surfaces (concrete, asphalt, hard packed earth) under and around equipment. Sixty percent of all playground injuries are caused by falling onto hard surfaces. Clean sand, pea gravel, wood mulch or manufactured material are acceptable surfaces. Professional installation is a wise policy. Check CPSC for depth, width and other details.

- Equipment not appropriate for age of children. Look for safety signs that state ages for which the playground was designed. Watch your children play to ensure they are able to use the equipment without signs of fear or falling.

- Areas that can entrap a child's head (spaces between 3 1/2 and 9 inches). Small bodies can fall or crawl through openings as small as 4 to 5 inches wide, leaving a child suspended by the head.

- Shearing or crushing devices (moving parts, gear boxes, missing or loose inspection plates). Check for worn and loose parts where fingers, arms or legs could be inserted.

- Excessive heights or heights without protective barriers. In general, 6 to 7 feet is a maximum height for school-age children, even when protected by resilient surfacing. Overhead exercise equipment such as trapeze bars, rings and track (pulley) rides should not be more than a few inches above children's standing reach.

- Improperly anchored equipment. All concrete footings should be recessed 4 to 6 inches under grade or base ground and securely anchored. Concrete at the base of fire poles should be well underground and covered by resilient surfacing.

- Rotting wood or rusting metal, especially underground. Probe underground to ensure equipment is not in danger of collapsing.

- Metal slides or decks exposed to the sun. Provide shade or use plastic. Toddlers can "freeze" to hot surfaces and suffer severe burns.

- Protruding bolts, openings, S-hooks or other elements that can entrap or entangle clothing or jewelry. Such entanglement can lead to amputation or strangulation.

- Heavy swing sets. Animal seat swings or swings with protruding elements should be replaced with lightweight rubber or plastic seats. Watch for young children walking in the path of swings.

- Slippery decks, particularly when wet. Some decks, especially some vinyl-coated metal decks, are very slippery and should not be used when wet. Select slip-resistant decks that do not contain holes that can entrap children's fingers.

- Broken, missing, damaged or loose parts on equipment. Sharp or jagged edges can cut or puncture.

- Loose ropes, cords, wires, cables on playground. Such loose materials have

caused strangulation. All such items, including jump ropes, should be used only under supervision and kept in storage at other times.

⚠ Missing or poorly maintained fences. Apply guidelines for safe playground equipment to fences.

⚠ Grounds in poor condition. Trash, toxic material, broken glass, hypodermic needles, damaged safety signs, tripping obstacles and standing water are all hazards in a play area.

⚠ Equipment in a general state of disrepair. Rot, rust, warping, cracking, bending, termite infestation, and broken or missing components are signs of disrepair.

⚠ Electrical apparatus accessible to children. Air conditioners, switch boxes, transformers, etc., should be made inaccessible to children.

⚠ Equipment for organized games should be in good repair and designed for safe play (e.g., padded steel basketball posts, sturdy soccer goals firmly anchored in the ground).

⚠ Pools of water accessible to children. Children should use wading pools, buckets of water, etc., only under close supervision. Swimming pools should conform to national, regional, state and local standards, ordinances and codes. Toddlers and preschoolers are at high risk for drowning when playing near pools. Inadequate gates and fences are a common cause of young children entering pools unsupervised.

Good playgrounds are never finished.

How can parents improve children's playgrounds?

- ✔ Learn about playground safety. Teach your child about safety—you are not always with them.
- ✔ Evaluate your child's playgrounds using the CPSC Handbook. Ask to see the maintenance records. Expensive is not necessarily safe.
- ✔ Notify school principal, child care center director or public park director of serious playground hazards. Document your findings with the CPSC Safety Handbook. If no action is taken, go to the next higher level of administration—school board, parks board. Be courteous, factual and informed.
- ✔ Regulate and limit your children's television viewing and provide regular opportunities for active play. Many children are injured because they have poorly developed motor skills. Excessive TV viewing coupled with junk food consumption is damaging to children's fitness and health.
- ✔ Visit child care centers or schools during outdoor play time to evaluate playground supervision. At least two adults should be on the playground so that children are never left alone. The total number of children should not be greater than the equipment can reasonably accommodate. Supervisors should move about the playground—assisting, encouraging and observing children.
- ✔ Determine whether all adults who supervise children during outdoor play have regular training in playground safety, first aid and medical emergency practices.

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The Multiage Classroom: A Guide for Parents

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A simple definition of a multiage classroom is *a mixed-age group of children who stay with the same teacher for several years.* The children, teacher and even the parents become a unique "family" of learners.

The children are usually grouped by ages 5-6-7, 6-7-8, 8-9-10 and so forth. These groupings are deliberately made for the benefit of children and not for reasons of economics or convenience. The multiage classroom is designed to give every child opportunities to find success on his or her own path of growth.

How Do Children Learn in a Multiage Classroom?

In the multiage classroom, children engage in real and meaningful activities at their own levels of development. The children learn to read by reading, write by writing and problem-solve by solving problems. By working together at centers and on projects, children learn from one another.

The teacher keeps track of each child's progress through portfolio assessment. This progressive collection of children's work enables the teacher to determine the next steps required for each child's learning.

What Are the Benefits of Multiage Classrooms?

• **Several years spent with the same teacher.** Children have a chance to fully develop as learners when they have the same teacher for several years. The teacher knows each child's strengths and needs and is therefore better able to support his or her learning. No time is wasted getting to know the students.

• **Continuous learning.** Children in multiage classrooms have several years to develop. They have the opportunity to see themselves as progressive, successful learners.

• **Respect for the individual child.** In same-grade classrooms, it is easy to expect all children to learn at the same rate or study the same curriculum. In the multiage classroom, each child is viewed individually. The wide diversity makes it impossible to see children as the same. Instead, the teacher focuses attention on teaching each child according to his or her strengths and needs rather than teaching a prescribed curriculum to the whole class.

• **No labeling.** When expectations are the same for all children, labeling occurs. Same-grade classes may arbitrarily label children "below grade level," "on grade level" or "above grade level." Children labeled as "low" may stop trying; children labeled as "high" may not feel challenged. The multiage classroom eliminates the need to label children. The focus is not to get each child on "grade level," but rather to support each child's development to the next level on his or her learning path. Free from labels, every child is able to see himself or herself as a competent, developing individual.

• **Focus on success.** In the multiage classroom, children see themselves as successful learners. The teacher focuses on the child's strengths, and supports and challenges the child to reach the next level of development. Each step is viewed as a success, which helps motivate the child to continue learning and enjoy the process.

• **No retention.** Retention is emotionally devastating for children; some never recover. The multiage classroom gives children time to grow at their own rate without the fear of retention.

• **Family unit.** Because children are with the same teacher and group for several years, they become a "family of learners." Within the family, which includes parents, they learn to support and care for one another.

• **Mentoring/leadership.** In the multiage classroom, each child has the opportunity to be mentored and to be the mentor. Younger children are nurtured by older children, who enjoy the role of leadership and helping others. In same-age classrooms, only a few children enjoy this role.

• **Cooperative social interaction.** Because expectations are different for every child in the multiage classroom, children cooperate rather than compete. This spirit of cooperation leads children to support each other as individuals and in their learning processes.

• **Cross-age learning.** Research has found that multiage classrooms increase opportunities for cross-age learning. Younger children benefit from collaborative learning with older children and accomplish tasks that are often beyond their independent capabilities. Older children model more sophisticated approaches to learning for the younger children, which increases the older children's level of independence and competence.

• **Self-directed, autonomous individuals.** In the multiage classroom, children are invited to take charge of their learning. At centers and with project work, children make choices about their own learning, which allows them to enjoy "ownership" of their learning. Such self-directed learning is the foundation for lifelong learning.

• **Positive learning environment.** Without labels, retention or grades, children are free to learn at their own pace. Mentoring enables children to learn in an emotionally secure environment. With the focus on success rather than failure, children enjoy learning.

Multiage classrooms are sought out by educators and parents as a preferred option to traditional same-age, same-grade classrooms. What is it about multiage classrooms that has inspired this interest and produced enthusiastic dedication from administrators, teachers, parents and children?

Same-Grade Versus Multiage: What's Best for Children?

Organizing and classifying children by age has long been the norm for public education. The graded school system, however, is based on some false assumptions about children and education.

Graded schools assume that same-age children are the same in development and needs. The multiage classroom assumes that *all* children are different in their development and needs. These differences are considered natural and normal.

Graded schools assume that same-age children can be taught in the same way. The focus, therefore, is on teaching rather than learning. In the multiage classroom, the focus is on learning. The teacher facilitates learning by respecting each child's learning rate and style. Learning is child-centered rather than curriculum-centered.

Graded schools focus on education as a product rather than a process. The child who has mastered certain skills is a success, while the child who has not is a failure. In the multiage classroom, each child is on his or her own path of learning. Children are not judged by comparisons with same-age classmates, but are supported and challenged in their own journey of learning. Every child can find success.

What Does Research Say?

Research indicates that academic achievement in multiage classrooms is the same as, or better than, in same-grade classrooms. Multiage classrooms do not negatively affect student achievement. Students in multiage classrooms *do* have significantly more positive attitudes toward school, themselves and others.

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Multiple Intelligences:

Different Ways of Learning

Judith C. Reiff

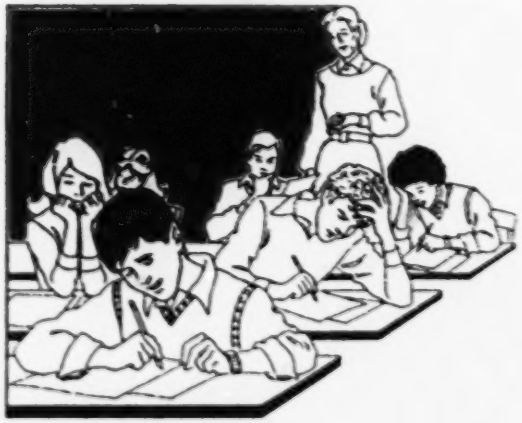
Association for Childhood Education International

Verbal Learners

- Have a sensitivity to the meaning, sounds and rhythms of words
- Enjoy storytelling and creative writing
- Love reading, poetry, humor and find pleasure in working puzzles and solving riddles

Suggestions for Parents

- Read with your child
- Listen intently to your child's questions, concerns and experiences
- Provide books for your child to read and paper for writing
- Encourage your child to tell you about the story he/she read or to share with you something he/she has written (a tape recorder is a helpful aid)
- Provide opportunities to visit the public library and local bookstores
- Play games such as Scrabble™, Yahtzee™ and Boggle™



Logical Learners

- Enjoy number games, problem solving, pattern games and experimenting
- Have strong reasoning skills and ask questions in a logical manner
- Like order and step-by-step directions

Suggestions for Parents

- Let your child experiment
- Invite your child to help you bake a cake or make new colors by mixing paints
- Show your child how to use a calculator
- Ask your child to help set the table, sort clothes or organize the desk drawer
- Play games such as UNO™, checkers and chess

Visual Learners

- Enjoy creating visual patterns and need visual stimulation
- Are daydreamers
- Have a talent for art

Suggestions for Parents

- Allow your child to create with various arts and crafts
- Give your child opportunities for solving puzzles or inventing
- Let your child design a "play corner" in his/her room
- Visit art museums
- Let your child use a camera to take pictures of family and friends
- Provide a variety of art mediums such as paints, crayons and magic markers for your child to use
- Play games such as Pictionary™ or cards

Musical Learners

- Enjoy playing instruments, singing songs, drumming
- Like the sounds of the human voice, environmental sounds and instrumental sounds
- Learn easier if things are set to music or to a beat

Suggestions for Parents

- Allow your child to select a recording at the local music store
- Encourage your child to sing along or clap to the rhythm of music
- If possible, involve your child in some type of music lessons
- Provide opportunities to attend concerts and musicals
- Have sing-alongs

Physical Learners

- Are athletic and active
- Enjoy creative dramatics, role-playing, dancing and expressing themselves with movement and bodily actions
- Learn through physical movement and from touching and feeling
- Use movement, gestures and physical expression to learn and solve problems
- May touch while talking

Suggestions for Parents

- Involve your child in dancing, acting or sport activities
- Provide a variety of manipulatives for experimentation
- Walk, jog, hike, play tennis, bowl or bike as a family
- Play games such as charades

Children's ways of learning are as different as the colors of the rainbow. All people have different personalities, preferences and tastes. Teachers and parents need to be aware of and value these differences. Through observation, parents can learn what kind of learners their children are. Once parents know what kind of learner their child is, they can then develop activities that make the most of their child's abilities.

Extrovert Learners

- Are very social
- Can "read" the feelings and behaviors of others
- Are excellent leaders and enjoy being part of a group
- Can help peers and work cooperatively with others

Suggestions for Parents

- Play family games
- Encourage your child to participate in group activities
- Encourage discussions and problem solving

Introvert Learners

- Like to work independently
- Are very self-motivated and prefer solitary activities
- March to a different drummer
- Have the ability to understand their own feelings, motivations and moods

Suggestions for Parents

- Give your child time to work or play alone
- Ask your child to make something for the whole family to enjoy
- Encourage your child to keep a diary or journal

You can provide a great deal of insight into how your child learns. Educators strive to provide a learning environment where every child experiences success.

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